

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Responses to Questions for the Record
for Mr. Peter Lopez
Hearing on “Bureaucratic Challenges to Hurricane Recovery in Puerto Rico”
before the
Subcommittee on National Security
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
March 22, 2018**

Submitted by Chairman Ron DeSantis:

Question: Puerto Rico is home to a number of pharmaceuticals and other hazmat generating industries. EPA was responsible for conducting assessments of these facilities in the aftermath of the storm. What did they find? Is there any ongoing risk to the residents of Puerto Rico?

Response: In the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, EPA conducted assessments of about 300 regulated facilities in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, including facilities that generate hazardous waste, pharmaceuticals, as well as facilities that store chemicals and oils in bulk; EPA also assessed 32 superfund sites and 233 wastewater facilities in Puerto Rico. EPA found no major leaks or releases from any of the facilities nor any situations where nearby residents were at risk from a release from a facility. EPA did respond to several minor spills and collected over 326,000 drums and containers of household hazardous waste in Puerto Rico as of April 22, 2018.

Submitted by Representative Jenniffer Gonzalez-Colon:

Question: How has this situation affected the status of the landfills in Puerto Rico? Have there been proposals submitted for alternate debris disposal efforts? Complaints about difficulty?

Response: The hurricanes made the already extremely difficult situation of the solid waste crisis in Puerto Rico, with many open dumps that do not meet basic landfills standards, worse. The storms generated approximately 3.85 million cubic yards, according to the US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE). There was also an increase in illegal dumping following the hurricanes. EPA, in coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and USACE, has assessed over 150 illegal dumps that appeared after the hurricane and we have been collecting hazardous waste from across the island. In addition, EPA is beginning work with the Puerto Rico government and local municipalities to help them assess landfill capacity as a first step towards making improvements to programs to handle solid waste.

Debris collection was specifically a USACE lead. It is EPA's understanding that vegetative debris was chipped and mulched; construction and demolition debris was managed through grinding operations, and of course, EPA assisted with any items that could be hazardous. EPA also provided air monitoring during the grinding operations of construction and demolition debris conducted by the U.S. Virgin Islands government and the USACE. EPA was not requested to provide air monitoring support for any grinding operations in Puerto Rico.